The Criminology of Criminality, the Arc of Tension and the Harvest of Insecurity in Nigeria: Implications for National Security

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Abstract

This study was undertaken to determine criminal, arc of tension and harvest of insecurity in Nigeria. The study indicated that insecurity in the south-south regions are aggravated by militia and other armed youths who involved themselves into oil-theft, pipe-line vandalization and other antisocial behaviours in the south-south region. In Northern Nigeria, crime activities is caused by the Boko Haram sects and terrorists which has resulted undermines socioeconomic activities. Criminology of criminal is aspect of crime study that deals with all forms criminal behaviors and how it can be prevented In this paper it has been argued that crime is not just an outcome of human failures, but socio-economic factors which serves as means of survival. The notion for "arc of tension" is relevant in gaining knowledge about how crime has increased over the years, causing fears across different parts of Nigeria. The study revealed that the "harvest of insecurity" is the recognition of long term crime challenges which has affected Nigeria negatively. The study used control theory of Hirschi which assumed that that social bonding for attachment of family, friends, human commitment to societal accepted goals and adherence to societal norms and values, this in the long run cad aid in coping with crime in the society. The study concluded criminologist play a great role in studying the behaviour of criminal and how crime rate can be reduced in the society. The arc of tension raises awareness in the public, where there is increasing insecurity challenges and crime in Nigeria.

Key Words: Arc of Tension, Criminology of Criminal, Harvest of Insecurity, Insecurity, National Security.

Introduction

The criminology of insecurity in Nigeria can be understood by looking at the interplay between criminal actors, structural vulnerabilities and the spatial patterns of violence that are frequently referred to as a "arc of tension." This concept describes the spread of insecurity across regions via the interconnected forms of violence involving insurgents, militias and organised criminal networks. For some years now, Nigeria has continued to experience mass killings, kidnappings and armed attacks – a sign of the limited capacity of state institutions to ensure security and accountability. Simultaneously, the country is experiencing a multilayered humanitarian crisis caused by conflict and displacement, strengthening the notion of a "harvest of insecurity", where violence has cumulative social and economic repercussions (Human Rights Watch, 2026).

The fundamental issue is that insecurity in Nigeria has evolved into a systemic and organized form of criminality, with identifiable perpetrators and structural weaknesses. In the North-Central region, the main actors are armed pastoralist groups, ethnic militias and jihadist-linked elements, with activities taking the form of farmer–herder conflicts and communal violence. Recent incidents such as the 2026 Kwara State attacks, which claimed the lives of more than 160 people, are indicative of the increasing scale and coordination of violence in the region. Repeated violent incidents in Benue and Plateau states also point to the transformation of resource-based conflicts into organized armed conflicts, making the region one of the most volatile in Nigeria

(Reuters, 2026).

Insecurity in the South-South is largely caused by militant groups, oil-theft syndicates and organized criminal networks. The actors are involved in pipeline vandalism, illegal oil refining, piracy and kidnapping, thus undermining local livelihoods and the stability of the national economy. Levels of violence in the region, less publicised than the northern insurgency but still high, are linked to grievances over control of resources and environmental degradation. Over time, these grievances have transformed into profit-oriented criminal enterprises, blurring the lines between political militancy and organized crime (WANEP, 2025).

The problem is exacerbated by the fact that criminal activities are linked across regions, forming a continuous arc of tension. For instance, insurgent groups in northern Nigeria are becoming more connected to wider Sahelian militant networks, increasing their mobility and operational capacity. At the same time, banditry and kidnapping trends are expanding into the central regions, while organized criminal networks in the South-South add to the national instability. These dynamics underscore that insecurity in Nigeria is no longer localized, but mutually reinforcing across regions (Reuters, 2026).

Ultimately, the fact that the insecurity persists is indicative of the lack of capability within the governmental framework to deter criminal acts. The poor governance situation, poverty levels, high unemployment rates, and the availability of small weapons are factors that have enabled criminal elements to flourish in their operations. This has led to the vicious cycle where the "harvest of insecurity" produces further insecurity, exacerbates socio-economic challenges, and increases tensions, particularly in North-Central and South-South areas of Nigeria (Human Rights Watch, 2026)

Conceptual Review

Criminology of Criminal

Criminology is an academic subject that involves the study of crime through different disciplines such as sociology, psychology, politics, and law. Crime is viewed both as a social phenomenon and as an individual's behavior within the society. The growing complexity of insecurity such as terrorism, kidnapping, banditry, and cybercrime has made criminology more relevant in Nigeria. The science of criminality deals with the study of crime, criminals, and criminal behavior within society, exploring why people or groups commit crimes and why and how this behavior evolves and can be prevented (NJCSS, 2025).

Theoretical criminology of criminality argues that crime is not only the result of an individual's moral failure but also the result of social and economic factors that give rise to crimes as a means of survival. Such things include poverty, unemployment, social exclusion, and poor governance, among others. In Nigeria, such social issues have been found in the establishment of organized criminal gangs that thrive due to poor governance and ungoverned areas. Research has found that the existence of insecurity in Nigeria is connected with such issues (Taylor & Francis, 2025).

From an applied perspective, criminal behavior in Nigeria has become more organized, flexible, and economically oriented. Kidnapping, for instance, has moved from being an isolated act to a well-organized form of crime where organized groups use violence as a tool to extort money from their victims. This indicates that criminal activities in Nigeria have changed from opportunistic behavior to a form of business venture where criminals approach crime in a way that yields profits.

Another aspect that criminology takes into account is the importance of the role played by the criminal justice system in crime prevention and control. Nonetheless, in the case of Nigeria, there are various shortcomings faced by these institutions, which include cases of corruption, lack of effective implementation, congestion in jails, among others. Such limitations lower the level of deterrence, thus resulting in criminal behavior being sustained. This has made it hard for the criminal justice system to cope with changes in crime (FJCSS, 2025).

From a holistic perspective, criminology of criminality is a tool to explain criminality in Nigeria as a consequence of structural factors,

behavioral adaptations, and institutional deficiencies. This shows that criminal behavior is not haphazard but rather a response to socio-economic circumstances and institutional inadequacies. Criminal organizations in Nigeria have become more sophisticated, showing that the need for better institutions, socio-economic reforms, and effective crime prevention approaches is essential to tackle the sources of criminal behavior (SSA Publications, 2025).

Arc of Tension

The idea of an "arc of tension" is essential for comprehending the criminology of criminality and insecurity harvesting in Nigeria, especially in places like the North-Central and South-South areas. This involves a spatial-functional continuum of violence, whereby various types of insecurity, even though caused by different players, are linked and interdependent across Nigeria. The arc of tension in the North-Central area is predominantly formed by farmer-herder conflict, communal militia, and the outgrowth of banditry and insurgency from the North-West and North-East regions. What initially starts off as a conflict based on resources for land and pastures turns into armed conflict with involvement of ethnic militia and gangs. As the actors become more adept at conflict tactics, such as attack, raiding villages, and retaliations, local conflicts end up becoming security issues. In recent times, the area has turned out to be volatile with incidents of attacks and mass killings, suggesting that it has emerged as one of the focal areas in the national arc of tension (European Union Agency for Asylum, 2026; Human Rights Watch, 2026).

The arc of tension is exhibited differently in the South-South zone but is related to the general national crisis. In this region, the major players are militant groups, oil thieves, and organized crime gangs involved in pipeline sabotage, illegal refining, piracy, and kidnappings. Though the actions are usually motivated by the environmental impact of the oil industry and its control, the activities have become very organized and structured crime. Apart from sustaining the criminals in the region through illegal trade, the activities also provide indirect financial support for broader insecurity by funding groups operating in other zones. Thus, the South-South zone represents the economic dimension of the arc of tension, where crimes produce resources to sustain instability (ACAPS, 2026).

From a criminological perspective, the arc of tension emphasizes the interdependence of criminals and their chances within Nigeria. For instance, the availability of small arms, ineffective border security, and poor governance facilitates the transport of weapons and combatants from one part of Nigeria to another. Violent groups operating in the northern part of the country might inadvertently gain from the proceeds of crime that results from the stealing of oil resources in the southern part of the nation. Banditry and kidnapping might move into the central parts of the nation, and the distinction between crimes becomes blurred (Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, 2025).

Moreover, the trajectory of tension is directly related to what is referred to as the “harvest of insecurity,” which refers to the sum total effects of persistent insecurity. In the North-Central and South-South zones, such effects include mass displacement, disruption of livelihood, hunger, and social fragmentation. The more prolonged the violence, the greater vulnerability is, and recruitment to violent gangs rises while the legitimacy of the state falls. A vicious circle is thus created, whereby insecurity breeds conditions for more insecurity (UNOCHA, 2026; Human Rights Watch, 2026).

Harvest of Insecurity in Nigeria

The "harvest of insecurity" in Nigeria is an explanation of the human, economic, and institutional impacts of prolonged violence and criminality in the country. It describes what the insecurity results in—the displacement of people, lack of food, poor livelihoods, environmental degradation, and low state capacity. The harvest of insecurity is closely associated with Nigeria's growing belt of tension, which involves the amplification of various kinds of violence within the different regions. As demonstrated by recent humanitarian evaluations, Nigeria is currently experiencing a critical situation, characterized by millions of individuals suffering from hunger due to conflicts and insecurity (World Food Programme, 2025).

The harvest of insecurity in North-Central Nigeria is best seen in the fall of agricultural productivity and rural living conditions. The recurring conflict between farmers and herdsmen, coupled with acts of communal violence and militia attacks, has rendered the activity of farming hazardous, compelling some rural communities to evacuate their farms. Consequently, there has been a marked reduction in the country's agricultural productivity. Research evidence has proven that insecurity has a significant influence on the level of agricultural productivity in Nigeria (Arvin & Faloyin, 2025). Benue, Plateau, and Niger states have become notable centers of displacement, where farming communities are constantly under attack (European Union Agency for Asylum, 2026).

For the South-South states, the product of insecurity takes the form of environmental degradation, economic sabotage, and criminal activities involving the extraction of petroleum resources. Various militant factions, oil thieves, and refinery operators have indulged in the sabotage of pipelines and crude oil theft, resulting in huge economic losses and environmental degradation. Although the causes of such activities may be justified by the need to challenge the dominance of the government in the control and utilization of natural resources, they have transformed into highly organized criminal syndicates that undermine the economy at both national and local levels (West Africa Network for Peace building [WANEP], 2025).

Insecurity harvests also consist of the deterioration of governance and erosion of state institutions. Violence breeds lack of confidence among the citizenry in the government's abilities, making the provision of security and other social services difficult for the state. The affected regions have been known to rely on community vigilante groups and other informal measures in order to secure themselves, thereby adding to the already complex nature of the security situation. The humanitarian agencies have observed that the ongoing insecurity has resulted in the displacement of millions of Nigerians and has placed tremendous pressure on the systems designed to respond to such situations (UNOCHA, 2026).

Theoretical Framework

The Control Theory was developed by Travis Hirschi, an American Criminologist, in 1969. He published his landmark work entitled "Causes of Delinquency." This theory was formulated in reaction to past theories of criminology, which concentrated largely on explaining the reasons behind criminal behavior among people. Travis Hirschi posed a new question in his theory: if there are certain factors that make people commit crimes, what makes them observe laws and behave lawfully all the time? Hirschi's reply to this question was that social control keeps people from committing crimes.

Additionally, Hirschi outlined four main components of social bonding: attachment to family and friends, commitment to socially acceptable goals, involvement in socially acceptable activities, and belief in societal norms and rules. When the four components are strong, there is a low likelihood of deviation. Conversely, when the four components are weak, one becomes alienated from the society and engages in criminal behavior.

Indeed, the control theory is highly applicable to the study of criminology, especially in Nigeria, through the concept of arc of tension and harvest of insecurity. This theory explains why many youths engage in activities such as banditry, militancy, insurgency, and kidnapping.

Criminology of Criminal, Arc of Tension and Harvest of Insecurity in Nigeria: Implication for National Security

Analysis of recent trends shows that there is geographic expansion of insecurity in Nigeria, where militant groups are now engaged in operations in more than one region because of poor state control over such areas. Insecurity harvest is all the social and economic effects of prolonged violent clashes within the arc of insecurity in vulnerable areas. Insecurity harvest involves what insecurity creates in society over time through suffering, loss of economic activity, and institutional decay. Criminologists and scholars of security studies have pointed out for a very long time that violence is not only detrimental immediately but also structurally harmful over time (Adebayo, 2020).

This harvest takes a very serious form in the form of displacement and the collapse of agriculture in particular in the North-Central zone of Nigeria. Farmers from Benue State, Plateau State, and Niger State, among others, have faced multiple assaults from armed gangs and community militias that have forced people to flee their homes and farms. In accordance with Igbo & Okeke (2021), rural insecurity causes disruption within agricultural systems by restricting access to land for cultivation, food production, and rural livelihoods.

According to Onuoha (2022), insecurity within the agrarian areas results in a reduction in the national food chain, reliance on food imports, and high prices of food. This makes the population even more vulnerable to being exploited and displaced. Thus, the criminology of crime, arc of tension, and harvest of insecurity in Nigeria can be seen in the table below.

Table 1: Harvest of Insecurity in South-South, Nigeria.

Harvest of Insecurity in South-South	Nature of Violent	Effects in South-South	Remarks
Oil theft through pipe line vandalism.	The criminal syndicates and militants indulge in stealing crude oil, pipeline vandalism, and illegal refining.	Revenue decline, pollution, death of marine creatures, and economic instability.	Crime is economic in nature and rooted in the conflict over resource control (Onuoha, 2021).
Experiences of insurgency and militant activities.	The armed militant groups conduct attacks against the oil facilities and security personnel.	Interruption of oil production, security threats to rural people, relocation of local residents.	Militancy is associated with grievance against marginalization and environmental pollution (Etemike, 2020).
Involvement of youths in criminal acts.	The unemployed youth are enrolled in the militant activities, oil theft, and kidnappings.	Unemployment increase, social unrest, intergenerational criminal behavior.	Poor social infrastructure and unemployment fuel the recruitment into crime (Adebayo, 2020).

Source: Online Reviews, 2026.

From Table 1, the primary aspects of insecurity in the South-South region of Nigeria can be observed, along with the impacts and causes of violence in the region. From Table 1, it can be seen that insecurity in the South-South region is strongly related to socio-economic and political variables, especially oil exploration and underdevelopment. From the table one of the biggest problems faced by the South-South region is the security issue arising from the stealing of oil as a result of pipeline vandalism.

Criminal gangs often involve themselves into acts of oil bunkering, pipeline sabotage, and illegal refining. Such acts have caused severe ramifications, which include loss of government revenue, pollution, death of fish, and economic instability. The observation further reveals that such crimes are purely economic and have to do with resource control in the Niger Delta area.

The table also indicates that insurgency and militant operations play a major role in causing insecurity in the area. Armed militant outfits often engage in attacks against oil infrastructures and security officers, thus interfering with the oil extraction process.

Table 2: Harvest of Insecurity in North-Central, Nigeria.

Harvest of Insecurity in North Central, Nigeria	Nature of Violent	Effects in North-Central	Remarks
Mass Displacement of Persons	Continuous violence forces rural populations to abandon their homes and settlements.	Displacement of farmers in Benue, Plateau, and Niger States on a mass scale.	The citizens have condemned this to request a security operator to rescue Igbo & Okeke (2021).
Experience of Agricultural Collapse	Insecurity disrupts farming activities and reduces agricultural productivity.	Reduction in food production owing to their inability to farm safely.	This has impacted the source of income generation within the communities in the North-Central Zone (Igbo & Okeke, 2021).
Economic Decline	Loss of agricultural livelihood affects rural economy and national food systems.	Erosion of rural economies and an increase in poverty levels.	Weakening of rural economies and poverty levels, which also leads to a drop in agricultural productivity Onuoha, 2022).

Source: Online Reviews, 2026.

Table 2 above discussed about the Harvest of Insecurity in North-Central, Nigeria. The mass displacement of persons occurs when violence forces rural populations to abandon their homes and settlements. The experience of agricultural collapse through insecurity which disrupt farming activities and reduces agricultural productivity. The economic decline results to low agricultural yields which affects rural economy and national food systems.

Conclusion

Criminologist plays great role in studying the behaviour of criminal and how crime rate can be reduced in the society. The study showed that the arc of tension raises showed how members of the public frowns at the increasing level of crime across different parts of Nigeria. As the level insecurity has increased which has resulted to a down-turn of socio-economic activities.

Recommendations

This paper therefore recommends the following:

i) The security agencies and legal institutions should work collaboratively in addressing issues relating to crime and insecurity problem. This can go a long way in reducing tension and reliefs to members of the public.

ii) The Criminologist should establish a systematic way of tackling crime and rising insecurity level in order to reduce this challenge to the lowest level in Nigeria.

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